

Ethics, Counterinsurgency, and Perceptions in the Information Era

By Steven P. Basilici, Major, USA

Editorial Abstract: MAJ Basilici argues that in the current Information Era, it is very difficult for a government to win a counterinsurgent war when military members' actions do not consistently support stated values. Through analysis of the relationships between values and perceptions in the information realm, he demonstrates how military and interagency members can address current perception challenges.

Throughout US battlefield experience, one can clearly see the relationship between values and actions being played out. In the case of the American Revolution, once the Declaration of Independence was signed and presented to the King of England, the first thing the US Founders did was field a regular European-style army. They understood that their actions had to match their stated values; in order for the Revolution to be seen as honorable and legitimate, they had to act according to the accepted laws of war and be prepared to meet the British in the field. Later, as commander of the Continental Army, Washington's General Orders of Conduct stated "Purity of morals being the only sure foundation of public happiness in any country, and highly conducive to order, subordination, and success in an army, it will be well worthy."

As one thinks about the dominant influence the United States enjoys today as the world superpower, one might think the US is somewhat arrogant in its assertions. But, the preamble and Articles I and II of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed on 10 December 1948 and translated into over 300 languages, state much the same. From antiquity to the present there has been cultural tension over different views of what is right and what is wrong, and almost all cultures desire to apply their values universally to the rest of the world. When a nation chooses to go to war and exercises its sovereign right to use military force, it must act in a way that is ethically acceptable and morally justifiable in the eyes of its people. Especially challenged is the country that

justifies its choice to go to war based upon universally stated values and then in the conduct of that war consistently acts in ways that do not support those values.

A Theory on the Dynamics of War in the 21st Century

In the current Information Era, the technological advances that make up the information environment have actualized the people component of the what we know as the Clausewitzian Trinity



*UN delegates discuss the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
(US Dept of State)*

(CT). This is the theory that war is a manifestation of the relationship among the people of a nation, the military of that nation, and the government. As events unfold on the battlefield and are instantaneously reported in the information environment, perceptions are created that can affect the outcome of the war. Because of the power of perception, IO has become an overarching line of operation in the conduct of war.

Three forces have converged in the information environment to greatly increase the importance of the 'people' component of the CT. These are: 1) the

technological advances that have greatly increased, and are continuing to increase exponentially, the speed and diffusion of information; 2) the opening-up of free-market enterprise to the entire world as argued by Thomas Friedman in *The World Is Flat*, and Martin Van Creveld in *The Rise and Decline of the State*; and 3) the global consensus of acceptable conduct based upon the values outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other internationally accepted bodies of law. These three forces synergistically make up the powerful phenomenon that is actualizing the people component of warfare.

Universally Acknowledged Values

The effects of globalization have led to an increased awareness and consensus of universally acknowledged values that have been championed by the UN, and are now being enforced through NATO's ability to project military power. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) embodies principles that have been agreed upon by most signatory members of the United Nations and is one of the most widely used tools for applying diplomatic and moral pressure on governments. Although not a legally binding document, it is the foundation for the "original two legally-binding UN human rights Covenants, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights," and is widely referred to by academics and constitutional courts. While in the past the UN has often been criticized as an inept, powerless body,

it does represent an international forum for debate on the conduct of warfare. Furthermore, since the end of the Cold War the UN has gained influence and increased authority through organizations that have the power to enforce their charters.

Perhaps the most significant example of the necessity for internationally accepted statements of value is the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam (CDHRI). The drafting and ratification of this significant declaration, by the 19th Conference of Foreign Ministers in Cairo on 5 August 1990, established Shariah law as the only source of reference for the protection of human rights in Islamic countries. In the view of the 57 member states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), acknowledgement of this declaration established its supremacy over the UDHR [Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 24 and 25], based on the divine revelation of the writings of Mohammed and the Quran. The necessity of such a document became increasingly apparent to UN representatives of Islamic states, such as the Rajaie-Khorassani of Iran, who stated that the UDHR “could not be implemented by Muslims and did not accord with the system of values recognized by the Islamic Republic of Iran.” As in the Biblical justification for the destruction of the enemies of Israel, the Reformers’ dispute against the Catholic Church of the 14th and 15th centuries, and the Founding Fathers’ reasoning for carrying out the American Revolution in the 18th century, the OIC today is appealing to what they believe is a higher authority. The OIC upholds the CDHRI, which is based upon the writings of Mohammed and the Quran, over what they perceive to be a wholly secular document.

The Information Era of Warfare

The actions of militaries are being scrutinized by the global community in such a way that how they accomplish their missions has become just as important as successfully accomplishing their missions. More importantly, the



Perceptions shared on the world stage, via global media. (Defense Link)

playing field within the information environment is much more evenly matched than foes on the physical battlefield. The speed and diffusion of information and its effect on global or regional perception has become a crucial line of operation for governments and their militaries. This is particularly true in the ethical conduct of warfare because of an “equalization of power” between state and non-state opponents.

First, for the insurgent the war is ‘total,’ while for a foreign government it is necessarily ‘limited.’ Because the foreign government sees the war as a limited and possibly protracted conflict, fighting a total war is as politically unfeasible as fully mobilizing all their resources. Further, the government must continually justify positions and actions; they must sell or market the war in a way that sustains the popular will of their constituents—their people. Because of the inherent limitations imposed upon the foreign power, “the guerrilla can win simply by not losing, whereas the counterinsurgent power can lose by not winning.” When the influence of global perception is added to this equation, especially when the counterinsurgent is trying to mitigate global perceptions of his own unethical conduct, the true challenge of modern counterinsurgent warfare begins to surface. Actions must consistently support stated values because a perception of legitimacy, and through it popular will to support the war, must be maintained. Because perception and popular will are the key components of counterinsurgent warfare, they must

be the strategic and operational level planners’ first objectives.

Through reporting of events that create perceptions of—or highlight actual disconnects between—actions and values, we create a general consensus that may influence strategic-level decision makers. Furthermore, these perceptions are compounding and prone to distortion. This is like the child’s game whisper-down-the-lane, where children in a circle secretly whisper a short phrase to one another, in order to laugh at how distorted that phrase becomes.

In the same way, final understanding of an initial action will also have become distorted by ever growing assumptions and perceptions. Brigadier General Vincent Brooks, former US Army Chief of Public Affairs, calls these growing and changing perceptions the ‘ink-blot phenomenon.’ The initial perception widens just like an ink-blot as it takes on more and more mutations, making it very difficult to accurately understand the facts of the initial action. In all information events concerning a counterinsurgent’s unethical behavior, it is difficult to combat ‘wrong’ perceptions and relate the facts of what really happened. Furthermore, it is difficult for the counterinsurgent government to re-enfranchise the people, despite efforts to counter negative events through follow-up reporting of corrective actions.

Understanding that legitimacy is of utmost importance in counterinsurgent war is not a new concept. But with the advent of the Information Era, when a tactical-level action (i.e. one considered an atrocity) is placed into the information environment, it can have an adverse strategic effect much more quickly than in times past. In fact, even *alleged* unethical behavior can have almost instantaneous adverse effects. While the flow of information may be manageable, the management of consequence is not.

The Tipping Point

Author Malcolm Gladwell’s 2000 best seller *The Tipping Point* explains how a combination of key elements

can have powerful effects. In his online question-and-answer website, Mr. Gladwell states “that ideas and behavior and messages and products sometimes behave just like outbreaks of infectious disease. They are social epidemics.” His theory is that three phenomena work together to cause tipping points: contagious behavior; the fact that little causes can have big effects; and change happens not gradually but at one dramatic moment. He further states there are three types of people responsible for much of the change experienced in society: connectors, mavens, and salesmen. Connectors are those who seem to know everyone; they ‘collect’ people through ‘weak ties’—friendly yet casual acquaintances. Mavens are people who accumulate knowledge. They are what we in the military call ‘subject matter experts’ or ‘go to’ people, and are living data banks of specific or general knowledge. According to Gladwell salesmen are persuaders, uniquely charismatic people who seem to have answers to any objection. Tipping-point salesmen are so good at defeating any objections to their products, they are almost always successful at persuading their targeted audience. When the tipping point theory is adapted to 21st century warfare, and especially counterinsurgent warfare, one finds all of its characteristics present in the information environment.

In the Information Era, the little causes that can have big effects are the unethical actions on the battlefield reported or captured in written, audio, or visual form. The contagious behavior is the ever-increasing sharing and networking of information. The dramatic change, or tipping point, comes when these things working together spark action in the physical world, as seen all across France with the November 2005 Muslim youth riots. These incidents were reportedly sparked by the suspicious deaths of two Muslim youths electrocuted in a Paris electricity sub-station. The suspicious perception of this event acted as a tipping point within the Muslim community—a group

sharing a collective identity as a Diaspora within a globally networked Islamic society. The collective conscience of this disenfranchised community felt they were being maltreated by French society, and in a larger sense that they were at war with the West. Such feelings fueled, grew, and sustained the riots and destruction well beyond the expectations of French authorities. This collective identity is enabled and fostered through globally networked information connectivity. When looking for Gladwell’s mavens, connectors and salespersons, we need look no further than the information environment.

A New Reality in the Conduct of Warfare

In “Why the Strong Lose,” Jeffrey Record notes America has a “tendency to separate war and politics—to view

Spectrum Information Operations.’

MG Chiarelli and others in Iraq are relearning what the US Founding Father’s took for granted as common knowledge: when a people feel their basic rights are being violated, they rebel. Therefore, everything the counterinsurgent does must send the message that it is necessary for the protection of those inalienable rights. Ted Gurr explains this as ‘value expectations,’ where people perceive relative deprivation of the “conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled.” Thus, conditions have been set for collective violence. In *Military Review*, MG Chiarelli and Major Patrick Michaelis wrote they came to the realization that because of the power of the media and the speed of information flow, their division’s daily tactical operations were being played out not only locally on the streets of Baghdad, but both nationally and internationally.

They observed:

The actions of soldiers and leaders and their efforts on the ground can resonate at a strategic level in an instant. Shaping the message and tying that message to operations is as important, if not more so, to the desired individual effect as the previous five lines of operations.

The challenge to the American military institution today is acting on the sentiments and hard-learned lessons of MG Chiarelli and others. However, realizing what is necessary and doing what is necessary are two different things. The US military’s use of the information environment and information operations as a line of operation is sorely lacking at the operational and strategic levels. The military seems to have a serious aversion to the media—which is not entirely unjustifiable. The media industry has consistently shown the bottom line is its priority, and the bottom line is based on what sells: death, destruction, and the perception of corruption. By and large, media reporting practices have been extremely damaging to the perception of what the war-fighter has been trying to accomplish on the ground, thus damaging both

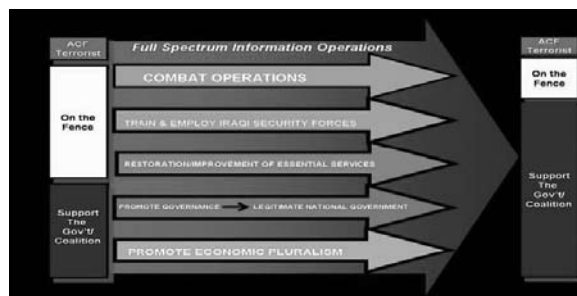


Figure 1. Full Spectrum Information Operations.

military victory as an end in itself, ignoring war’s function as an instrument of policy.” In other words, American military commanders are fixated on the kinetic fight and have forgotten the non-physical nature of war. This is an especially critical mistake to make in irregular, asymmetric warfare when the objective is building legitimacy and sustaining political will in order to win, rather than physically destroying the enemy. American commanders in Iraq over the last few years have learned this lesson. Major General Peter Chiarelli related this truth graphically in a Power Point™ briefing on how he dealt with insurgents in Sadr City in Iraq. As Figure 1 shows, MG Chiarelli came to understand that everything he did had to be nested in what he called ‘Full

US popular will (people) and political will (government). More specifically, the majority of the reporting has been focused on those events that actually serve to emphasize only the negative aspects of the counterinsurgency. Time and again, the media has created the perception of a disconnect between American actions and values. If the principle of legitimacy is as critical as the *Joint Publication for Military Operations Other Than War* (MOOTW) states:

"... committed forces must sustain the legitimacy of the operation and of the host government" to create "a strong impulse to support the action" then the US military planner must harness the incredibly fast moving dynamics of the information environment with a global vision."

Planners must do this through all of the mediums of the information environment, in a way that reflects ethical conduct that supports stated values, that is honest and transparent, and that will magnify the effects of combat actions on the ground. The people component of CT has become too powerful not to consider. Furthermore, the people component no longer simply refers to the people of the counterinsurgent's nation, but to a globally networked series of nations and non-state groups such as the Muslim Diaspora.

Abu Ghraib

The world has changed more in the last three decades than in the fifty previous years. If the 1970 My Lai incident in Vietnam marked the awakening of the people component of the CT, then the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) has shown it to be fully actualized as a much more decisive influence in the conduct of war. With the overwhelming US military dominance in every aspect of conventional war fighting, adversaries had no place to go except to the unconventional realm. Enabled by connectivity to the worldwide information environment, non-state and transnational organizations such as Al

Qaeda were able to organize through global collaborative networks. Al Qaeda could raise and transfer the necessary funds to equip, train, coordinate and then successfully execute 9/11: the single most devastating attack ever perpetrated on US soil.

In a stunning counteroffensive, the United States successfully attacked first Afghanistan and then Iraq, destroying government, military, and terrorist entities within those countries and replacing them with indigenous, democratic forms of government. While the justification of America's second preemptive offensive into Iraq is a point of heated debate and controversy, both the US Congress and the UN Security Council explicitly or tacitly authorized President Bush to use military force. Of

an extremely successful offensive operation, coalition forces captured Baghdad and other key cities, toppling Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime. Following the extremely successful conventional phase of the war, a complex insurgent war commenced, led by separate factions of the former Ba'athist party and Islamic extremists. During subsequent military operations, the tactical-level unethical actions at Abu Ghraib took place. The isolated, unethical conduct of a group of Military Police (MP), Military Intelligence (MI), and civilian contractors at Abu Ghraib prison was widely recognized by both government officials, and the media, as having a very serious adverse strategic effect on what the US Government was trying to accomplish in Iraq.

The Abu Ghraib incident included various forms of torture and prisoner abuse that included beatings, indecent and sexually embarrassing posturing, threats of electrocution, and the use of police dogs to injure and terrorize prisoners. A concerned soldier turned over pictures of these acts to the military Criminal Investigation Division (CID). Concerned he might get in trouble for bringing this information to light, this same soldier gave a copies of the information to two different news agencies. The images subsequently surfaced in the information environment among many media

and Internet sources. These incidents directly affected both the strategic center of gravity of the American public's will and support for the GWOT—as well as the operational center of gravity of the Iraqi people—because the images were repugnant to both American and Iraqi sensibilities and values. While official Pentagon and independent panel reports noted the MP and MI relationship represented an aberration when compared to situations at other detention centers, the effects caused by the release of these actions into the information environment was extremely powerful.

The Abu Ghraib investigations illustrate how amplification and distortion



*Figure 2. Perceptions created through the Information Environment.
(Associated Press)*

key importance to this article is that UN Security Council's support was essential to such an attack. UNSCR 1441 offered Iraq a final opportunity to comply with disarmament obligations set out in ten separate resolutions since the First Gulf War in 1991, and represented part of the diplomatic reasoning used in justifying the invasion. While this study is not concerned with the geopolitical argument for or against such an attack, the fact the UN is an essential political body in the authorization of a sovereign nation's use of force is a critical supportive point.

The Abu Ghraib incident occurred in the context of the second military offensive in Iraq. Just 21 days after

of facts can create a negative perception within American minds—and worse, within Muslim minds—that does not accurately depict reality. Use of the phrase “much had gone terribly wrong in Iraq,” plus “Americans,” connotes general and collective condemnation of Americans as a people, rather than specific condemnation of the individuals responsible for the unethical behavior. The fact only five or six persons at the tactical level were responsible for the Abu Ghraib abuses is irrelevant. The perception of disconnects between actions and values at the national level had been created with both operational and strategic level effects. Even more dramatic is use of the word ‘atrocities’ in comparisons of Abu Ghraib and the 1970 My Lai incident. While one may acknowledge the relationship between prisoner abuse and the murder of 300 to 500 civilians as unethical, there is an extreme difference between the two. The word atrocity was not attributed to Abu Ghraib by either the independent or Pentagon investigators, and therefore the term is a perfect example of BG Brooks’ previously noted spreading ‘ink-blot’ phenomenon. More importantly, USG actions to re-enfranchise people offended by these acts becomes an extremely difficult task.

As an organization, the US military is not geared toward winning the battle of perceptions in the information environment. The necessary, comprehensive, general-officer-level investigations took months to complete, but in the information environment ‘comprehensive’ and ‘responsive’ are competitive concepts. Neither the immediate measures taken by the military to prevent further abuse or the disciplinary action taken against the perpetrators, carry anywhere near the impact of the initial reporting of the scandal. The media industry is not in the business of US government/military public affairs. If official representatives do not immediately and transparently inform the people of such events, the suspicion always exists that the truth is not being told—or is being partially covered up.

Thus, the second and third order effects of Abu Ghraib are extremely significant. DOD reaction to the Abu Ghraib incidents caused an avalanche of cascading policies and directives in both Iraq and Afghanistan. A memorandum published by the office of the Secretary of Defense and signed by then-Secretary Donald Rumsfeld followed an over 100 page independent panel review of DOD Detention Operations, as well as multiple reports on US treatment of prisoners in Iraq by the Congressional Research Center. All of this was meant to ensure effective implementation of reforms.

At the operational level, joint manuals such as *Detainee Operations in the Global War on Terrorism*, and *Multi-Service Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (MTTP)* were printed for the area of operations. These included an implementation suspense of 30 January 2006. At the tactical level, the Multinational Corps-Iraq produced *Detention Operations Do's and Don'ts* Smart Cards. Reporting of any breach in the law of war concerning these issues, by members of the coalition or civilian contractors, became critical information to be reported to commanders immediately upon discovery.

Once perceptions have been created in the information environment, they cannot easily be countered. Perception management is one of the biggest concerns for the military, as evidenced by the many institutional fixes implemented in response to these and other unethical actions reported in the information environment. The US Army's PAO Chief is acutely aware the Army doing the right thing by punishing persons found guilty of Uniform Code of Military Justice violations. He is also aware of the immense amount of work that is being done to correct unethical behavior. The investigations, research, doctrinal and policy reviews, and finally the writing and implementation of command directives enforce ethical conduct consistent with the Army values, at every level. Unfortunately, the PAO Chief is also painfully aware that the US Army is not engaging in the information environment as well as it could. One of the PAO's

main missions is to inform people of what is being done to ensure Americans, and the world, that we are acting in a way that embodies our most cherished values. We are definitely not engaging with the needed intensity to counter the negative perceptions of these unethical acts. The unfortunate fact is 90 percent of our effort is expended to ensure actions are transparently reported to the public and to the world; therefore, in a sense, the effort is wasted. Once an unethical act is reported, the damage is done—making mitigation of perceptions very difficult to counter. The bottom line is that we are losing the war of perceptions being fought in the information environment, because we have not learned how to communicate through it as a battle-space. We have not institutionally learned how to create truth-based, timely effects that serve to inform the people and preserve our freedom of action while leaving the enemy weakened and vulnerable. The war of perceptions, fueled by the relationship between actions and stated values, directly affects both political and popular will. Arguably, the war of perceptions should inform the physical war, as MG Chiarelli argues, at every level. In February of 2006, almost three years after the prisoner abuse scandal was uncovered and released to the public, new pictures (Figure 2) surfaced. This shows how images released in the information environment can make their way back to the street



LTC Nate Sassaman. (US Army)

in a way that will seriously damage the image of the counterinsurgent. The message sends a very clear message with Lady Liberty pulling the switch that brings torture to the Iraqi. There is perhaps no better visual depiction of Iraqi disenfranchisement, nor a more clear message of the disconnect between American actions and American values.

Lieutenant Colonel Sassaman

The story of Lieutenant Colonel Nathan Sassaman and his mechanized infantry battalion in Iraq's Sunni Triangle brings the juxtaposed dynamics of warfare in the Information Era into sharp focus. On a personal level, his story is one of tested values; but within the context of a counterinsurgent war, it is a story of how important it is to understand the consequences of making decisions inconsistent with national values. LTC Sassaman embodied American religious values as the son of a Methodist preacher, demonstrated American cultural values as a star on the football field in high school and college, and inculcated American military values as a graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point. Sassaman was a product of his environment, but had a strong sense of personal responsibility and self determination as he led his battalion in Iraq. These values were tested during a very difficult year in Iraq.

Sassaman's overall approach to dealing with the insurgent problem in his area of responsibility was one of heavy handedness, reflecting the US Army's Cold War mentality and culture. He was exactly what the US Army wanted, expected—and as far as institutional training allowed—had created. He was an aggressive and decisive combat leader. The problem was LTC Sassaman was not fighting a conventional war, but an insurgency. In insurgent warfare, the values one truly believes become difficult to embody; values are tested daily by the ambiguity caused by absence of a clearly identifiable enemy. As one *New York Times* journalist wrote: “[T]he straight lines and rigid hierarchy of the Army that had created him

seemed, like so many other American ideas brought to this murky land, no longer particularly relevant.” In the incredibly complex environment of counterinsurgent warfare, and because of the aggressive, heavy handed command climate LTC Sassaman had set, men under his command disregarded the clear protocol established for Iraqi citizens detained after curfew. Through the decisions of one of Sassaman's Platoon Leaders, First Lieutenant Jack Saville, soldiers took matters into their own hands, deciding to teach a lesson to a pair of Iraqi men caught out after curfew. 1LT Saville made the decision to force the two men to jump into the Tigris River, instead of following procedure and escorting them to a detention center. Whether intentional or unintentional, their methods reportedly led to the death of one of the two men. Following this incident, LTC Sassaman, one of America's most professional and outstanding combat leaders, made what is known as an irrevocable decision:

[He] decided to flout his 19 years in the Army and his straight-and-narrow upbringing. He turned to one of his company commanders, Capt. Matthew Cunningham, and told him what to do. “Tell them about everything,” Sassaman said, “except the water.”

His statement is a perfect example of tested values, because within Sassaman's words one can see the contrast of right and wrong: “tell them about everything” presents complete truthfulness; “except the water” includes a lie of omission. Without enumerating the second and third order effects of this decision, one can guess the negative outcome. Crucial to arguments in this article is the premise that Sassaman's decision not to publicize what his men had done was based upon his reasoning that such publicity would incite anti-American feelings. What he failed to grasp is that publicity at the tactical level was a moot point, because in the close knit familial and tribal culture of Iraq, news like this travels with lightening speed. At the operational level, this stellar commander was about to experience how unforgiving the US Army's environment and institution had

become. Strategically, LTC Sassaman's decision represented one of thousands that will collectively make or break the war in Iraq, by creating perceptions in the minds of the Iraqis. Are Americans a just people who have the legitimate authority to wield power? Or, are we people who simply have the power to compel coercion?

Because of an intense loyalty to his men—a loyalty forged in the extreme situations of combat—LTC Sassaman lost sight of this legitimate authority, and decided not to report the whole truth about that fateful evening. The outcome of his single decision resulted in loss of a commander of over 500 soldiers, the weakening of the Army's operational hold on Balad and surrounding areas, and a potential information event requiring immediate action—in order to keep it from becoming a strategic perception nightmare. While this case did not turn out to be another Abu Ghraib, it did result in the Courts Martial of 1LT Saville and a non-commissioned officer, both of whom were found guilty of assault and sentenced to six months and 45 days, respectively. Battalion commander LTC Sassaman, executive officer MAJ Robert Gwinner, and company commander CPT Matthew Cunningham were all given letters of reprimand including the words “wrongful, criminal and will not be tolerated,” that effectively end their military careers.

As in the case of Abu Ghraib, the damage done within the Iraqi community was most likely irreversible, especially loss of a family member within the close-knit Iraqi tribal society. While this incident certainly helped disenfranchise the American counterinsurgent force from the population in and around Balad, it also did much harm to the US Army. A significant difference between this case and Abu Ghraib is that the Army quietly and quickly initiated the Sassaman investigation. The implications of this event were not lost on the command. They became aware of the possibility of wrongdoing, and the effect the story could have not just on the Iraqis, but on the American public.

Even in the midst of an extremely complex war, the individuals responsible for this act were held accountable—punishment for unethical conduct under the UCMJ is thorough. But, as in the Abu Ghraib case, thorough measures taken to enforce the law within our own ranks carry much less weight than the initial reporting of the wrong doing in the information environment.

The Way Ahead

What is the ultimate importance of the relationship between ethics and counterinsurgency? In a single word, the answer is *perception*. Mao Tse Tung was correct in his prophetic statement that guerrilla campaigns would be worldwide. Guerrilla campaigns in the form of global jihad, being waged by transnational organizations like Al Qaeda, represent such a threat. Today's 'page in history' has been turned by the unprecedented communication and networking potential of the information environment.

Military planners must see the news, media, and Internet conglomerates as organizations that are biased to their own bottom line (whether economic, political or ideological), and must analyze these entities in ways that maximize their use in warfighting. Planners need to study the information environment's systems at the national and global levels, in order to understand each systems' response and reporting cycle. The information environment is a crucial line of operations, thus incorporating it into planning and execution timetables is crucial in all levels of war. DOD's objective should be to maximize use of the information environment through planned information releases of combat operations. More importantly, DOD must be the first to release the information. Jim Channon, writing about "The Millennium Force" after the Vietnam War, said teams "would drop into conflict areas and send out direct television coverage of the situation at hand." While this author is not a proponent of Mr. Channon's full concept, the method is the kind of proactive use of the information environment that is essential in the Information Era.



A Public Affairs soldier emphasizes the US message. (US Army)

DOD planners must be prepared to deliver the immediate response that people demand—and expect—to receive through the media. Simply put, DOD must compete with the media. Operational level planners and units must understand how to respond to the media by first knowing the media's purpose and mission at all levels. Secondly, military planners must have a better understanding of their own purpose and mission, based upon laws giving them the authority to conduct war at all levels. When US troops are perceived to have acted unethically, when their actions do not seem to support their values, we should see the event as an information opportunity rather than an information disaster. Of crucial importance is our understanding that this is not a Public Affairs Office (PAO) issue: it is a command issue. The PAO cannot decide when the commander will engage through the information environment. If DOD wants to succeed, entire organizations must think, plan, and act as communicators. The nature of the information environment, as a battlespace component in the Information Era of Warfare, demands this.

One entity that would help the US compete is a rival to existing media empires, in the form of a national level government-run media agency. If the key to winning counterinsurgent war is the popular will of the people, then we must engage that will through the information environment. Is this propaganda? *No*. The critical tenet we must adhere to: actions must support

stated values. Therefore, what we place in the information environment must be brutally honest and transparent—especially when reporting unethical behavior by government or military personnel. Such reports must include simultaneously details on measures taken to correct the alleged unethical action. The government must address problems immediately and with utmost transparency, because the alternative is almost always damaging. If alleged unethical conduct is not immediately reported by the government, and enters the information environment by any other agent, the government already loses the perception battle—or at least starts from a much weakened position.

Certainly the US Government has the tools to do this. Use of the Internet and network technologies are hardly new concepts. Dr. Dorothy Denning of the Naval Postgraduate School is a leading researcher in the social aspects of the networking phenomena which has evolved since the inception of the World Wide Web. Also, Dr. John Arquila, partnering with other academics, has adapted the concept of net-centric warfare to a warfighting approach called the swarming doctrine. Arquila has also led research and development involving world-class computer hackers, in order to uncover, track, and destroy adversarial computer networks. The United States has the tools and expertise to exploit the information environment from any technological or informational quarter. A huge reservoir of untapped talent lies in the corporate business

world—and in Hollywood. The USG and DOD must go out and recruit those with the expertise to use the information environment better than anyone else: those within the movie and marketing industries. This kind of recruitment was commonplace during World War II; there is no reason it should not be the same for the Global War on Terrorism. Existing capabilities must be brought together in order to develop tools for affecting the information environment: there must be an Information Environment Campaign Plan (IECP).

An Information Environment Campaign Plan

The IECP should lay out in excruciating detail the information assets apportioned from the COCOM level on down. These plans should specifically address the action-to-value message that must be sent through the information environment, and should be intimately synchronized with all operational and tactical level actions on the ground. Optimally, maneuver and information plans would be structured in a way to maximize the speed and diffusion of information globally, in a preemptive rather than reactive way. In a sense, we should drive the information environment's reporting cycle. The ability to understand global information environment systems and processes requires an in depth analysis of globally networked communications, with an emphasis on understanding and exploiting the information-flow loop. That is, planners must understand the 'physical action to reporting' cycle, to include how and when they can most powerfully affect the target audience's perspective. In his interviews with military planners in Qatar, Thomas Friedman noted:


[T]his technology has "flattened" the military hierarchy—by giving so much information to the low-level officer, or even enlisted man, who was operating

the computer, and empowering him to make decisions about the information he was gathering... the days when only senior officers had the big picture are over. The military playing field is being flattened.

Mr. Friedman never made a truer statement and his comments are just as applicable to the enemy. The Germans say, "Nach dem Spiel ist vor dem Spiel!" —After the game is before the game! One action leads to a perception created through the information environment, which influences the next action, leading to a perception created though the information environment, and so on. The US DOD must acknowledge the information environment as a battlespace, and begin to attack the enemy there—with the attention to detail we give the physical environment. Only then can we decisively engage the enemy through this perpetual cycle.

Understanding the relationship between ethics and counterinsurgency is critical, because perceptions created by actions that do not support stated ethical values can have strategic-level effects. Throughout history, the people component of the Clausewitzian Trinity has gradually gained influence relative

to its ability to receive information, and communicate its desires to its government.

Finally, in a presentation to the 2006 class of the US Army Command and General Staff College, then Chief of Staff of the Army General Peter Schoomaker observed that despite the ambiguity of the counterinsurgent battlefield and the incredibly challenging transformation presently taking place in the Army, there was one thing that made the American soldier capable of moving in any direction and accomplishing any mission—the American values he carries within himself. In this way, through education followed by rigorous and realistic training, the DOD will guard against unethical behavior on the counterinsurgent battlefield. In doing so, we simultaneously win the perception war along with the hearts and mind of the people. 

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